

Testimony for H.B. No. 5782

My name is Ann Linskey and I am a pharmacist that works for Walgreens in Hartford. I am a member of The Opioid Overdose Prevention Workgroup.

Opioids bind to receptors in the body, including the brain, and cause many effects. When opioids bind to the receptors in the brain they can affect the respiratory centers that control breathing. When doses are high enough, the body no longer recognizes when it needs to breathe. The frequency of breaths is decreased and the volume of air taken in with each breath is decreased.

As many of you know, naloxone is an opioid receptor antagonist. That means that naloxone is going to compete with opioid drugs to bind to the opioid receptors. In effect, the naloxone pushes the opioids off the receptors and therefore, restores the body's ability to breathe. Naloxone has no agonist activity, meaning that when it is bound to the receptor, it has no action of its own. Its only effect is to block opioids from binding to the receptors. It therefore has little to no effect in patients that have not taken opioids, even at high doses. It is safer than many other drugs that are used by first responders such as epinephrine for allergic reactions and glucagon for low blood sugar. Naloxone on its own can cause no harm. It can only reduce harm in people that have overdosed on opioids.

Many pharmacies in Rhode Island, including all Walgreens, already have a collaborative practice agreement in place that allows pharmacists to dispense naloxone without a prescription. Pharmacists go through a special training program and then provide counseling to anyone that receives naloxone from them. The recipients are taught to recognize an overdose, steps to follow including calling 911 before doing anything else, and how to administer naloxone. This type of service is very much in line with other important clinical services that retail pharmacists already provide, most notably immunizations. Infrastructure is already in place from the programs in RI and should be easy to duplicate here in CT.

There are many people that want to have access to naloxone but do not know how to get it. There are others that have prescribers that will not write a prescription for them despite the laws that allow them to do so. Pharmacists are uniquely positioned to help. We are highly accessible to everyone, even those that might not have a primary care physician. We can provide education, help refer to treatment programs and increase accessibility to a safe, potentially life saving drug. Please support HB 5782. I am happy to answer any questions.

Thank you,
Ann Linskey, PharmD, RPh